A Flexible Die Heater

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Assigned to:

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PATENT APPLICATION

Die heating is an operation which is required in several processes such as forging, extrusion, low pressure die casting, squeeze casting, glass extrusion and many more forming operations for sheet metal fabrication. The heating of the die is often the most critical start up procedure in forging, extrusion and pressure die casting operations. Improper pre-heating results in a variety of problems, the most significant being low die life on account of non-uniform temperature along the surface of the die (the primary cause for early failure or distortion from thermal fatigue).

A wide variety of thermal processing techniques are used for die heating. Most commonly, the dies are heated with one or several gas flame torches. Often, the gas torches are arranged in a manner so as to produce a distributed heat source on the die surface. The common problems encountered with this heating method are carbon deposits, high noise, very significant temperature non-uniformities and a large temperature difference between the upper and lower die surfaces in vertical configurations. There are also serious fire hazard risks associated with flame heating.

An alternative to die heating by flames is by convection or radiation (See e.g. article Simulating Convective Die Heating for Forgings and Pressure Casting, JOM, 2002 August [pp. 39-43]). Convection heating i.e. by a hot fluid such as heated air dramatically improves uniformity on account of its flexible coverage. When especially a

convective source is used instead of flame the problems such as carbon deposits, noise and explosion hazard conditions are clearly eliminated. The elimination of open flames for preheating of existing hot forging dies without major retooling effort or major increases to change-over is also now recognized as being critical for safety in the overall plant as many fires have been started by open flames.

Typically die preheating for forging involves pre-heating forging dies for example on four poster presses. The forging operation involves loading pre-heated billets from nearby furnaces into the press, and hot forging multiple parts per press cycle. Gas preheating methods may comprise of multiple gas torches heating for several hours to 100°C-500C pre-heat temperature of the die contact surfaces. The gas preheating method is inconsistent due to varying die configuration and direct flame hot spots. Direct flame hot spots may reduce the hardness or temper of the dies leading to pre-mature wear and replacement. In a recent report, a plant fire was started by the gas heating while employees were at lunch when a hydraulic hose burst near the open flame during unmonitored die pre-heating. The hydraulic oil was ignited by the open flame and the subsequent fire did extensive damage to the press equipment and the building. Process change is a high priority.

Crank or low pressure dies cast or forge dies generally weigh 600-6000 lbs each and are commonly made of the H13 material. Typical set-up utilizes four to six dies but location on the die plate varies across entire envelope due to wide variety of crank and cam shafts forged. Hub dies can utilize four per set-up with each die weighing 50 to 70 lbs or more.

It is well know in the art that dies may be heated with infrared heaters especially of the short wave kind. It is also well recognized in the art that convective heaters should really be used in place of infrared heaters (IR heaters) for providing the uniformity and coverage which infrared heaters are unable to give on account of line of sight heating by radiation. See Figure 1 which illustrates convective heating and line-of –sight radiative heating. Convective heating is more uniform as the fluid is able to pass over all surfaces.

However IR heating is generally faster than convection although the convective heating technique allows flexibility and versatility to die heating especially when there are contours and bends in the die or if other die inserts prevent line-of –sight heating. If the IR heating system could be made versatile enough to provide better coverage then IR heating would become more useful. It is the object of this invention to offer such a product. It is another object of this invention to provide a flexible IR heating system. It is a further object of the invention that the flexible IR system may be used in conjunction with convective heating. It is a further object of this invention that IR heating be used in conjunction with a non ionized gas and an ionized gas (see Figure 2). The ionized and non Ionized gas may be produced with the technique described in US Patent US5,963,709 (incorporated herein fully) and a recently filed application by Reddy et. al. (no number received yet).

Invention:

A foldable (flexible) system comprising of several independent but electrically connected IR units which may be connected as shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

Note how the flexible IR heating system provided in the manner shown in figures 3 and 4 may be manipulated to change the coverage, shape and performance by manipulating the metallic flexible arms and by the 180 and 360 degree swivel (i.e. along the axis of the heater module and heater and along the normal to the axis of the heater respectively). Note that the modules are pinned to at least one swivel point. Each module may also rotate 90 degrees. In this manner complete 3 dimensional spaces may be radiated in a manner not available previously. Note in this manner "Space hugging" is possible as is space optimization.

In a demonstration of the benefit of the flexible configuration a single module with swivel capability along the axis of the bulb axis was constructed and tested. See figure 5 below which demonstrate the heating of a surface area of a block of steel which extends beyond the heater coverage.

Figure 6 shows how a swiveling operation of a single module may be use to heat a surface which is 90 degrees to the plane of the heater.

Best mode:

Several best configurations and power settings are envisaged based on the application.

For die heating a 600lb block to 100C, a 48 kW unit i.e. 24 modules of 2 kW each in the configuration of Figure 3 is anticipated. In this manner the total usage of energy is nearly 25% of that which would be required by gas heating. The dies may be used as soon as the surface is heated. In this manner energy is saved compared to gas heating which is normally of such a long duration that the die has to be completely heated which requires a substantially higher amount of energy.

Another application for the flexible heater is in the paper mill industry for drying or glazing rapidly moving paper sheets. In this use a convective heating system is also contemplated with use with the flexible IR units or incorporating flexible IR modules. A 20kW system is anticipated.

The flexible heaters may also be used for paint removal. Here a medium wave bulb instead of a short wave bulb is preferred. For paint removing purposes from a surface a 2-4 kW medium wave units are contemplated.

The flexible heating system may also be used for drying asphalt and cement from a truck bed. A 50-100kW unit is anticipated for such a purpose.

In instances where additional uniformity or rate of heating is required, the flexible IR units may be used along with other gasses and also with ionized gasses.

For die heating: Multiple infrared short wave lamps with integral reflectors attached to a scissor action adjustable frame may be used in the flexible manner. Lamps can be mounted on either or both sides of the frame allowing even heating on top and bottom die halves. Lamps can be positioned for various die configurations by adjusting clamp position to frame and extending or contracting frame. Fine adjustment are made utilizing swivel feature on lamp clamping mechanism allowing bilateral 30^{0} adjustment from horizontal plane of the die face. This function allows quicker heating of target areas without wasting energy heating unused portions of the die block. Right size feature allows individual lamps to be switched off or removed from the frame to insure the most economical heating solution for each die configuration within the operating range of the frame model. This solution is a versatile open structure, without an enclosure or side panels, allowing dies of different sizes to be heated with the same equipment reducing overall tooling costs.

Equipment may be a direct plug in without the need for expensive controls. An optional temperature feedback system may be used utilizing style thermocouples for precise monitoring of die temperatures.

Other applications are possible such as in liquid phase joining where flexibility could be a benefit (typical example, C. A. Blue et al,. Metallurgical and Materials Transactions A, Volume 27 A, pg1-8, 1996) or for heat treatment of complex parts (typical example J. R. Davis, in Aluminum and Aluminum Alloys ASM Specialty Handbook, 1993)

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

While the specification concludes with claims particularly pointing out and distinctly claiming the present invention, it is believed that the same will be better understood from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 shows a convective heating and the illustration of line-of –sight radiative heating problems. Figure 2 shows the concept of extra heat deposition (i.e. over convection) by ionized gas. Figure 3 shows a flexible heating system in closed condition. Other flexible heating systems are similarly envisaged. Figure 4 shows a flexible heating system in open condition. Note that both up and down heating are possible in this configuration and the modules may be positioned for heating also 90 degrees to the up down plane. Each module may turn 180 degrees and in the sideways direction and 360 degrees in its plane. The flexible mesh may contour around bends easily. Figure 5 shows a photograph taken after swiveling a single heater module (shown in figure 6) post swiveling. Note that the bright area extends considerably beyond the coverage area even though side flaps are used which inhibit direct radiation which could be harmful. In figure 6, please note the 90 degree swiveling action in a single module.